

SOCIO ECONOMIC STATUS OF WOMEN AGRICULTURAL LABUORERS

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ABSTRACT

Although, 'GREEN REVOLUTION' has given our country self-sufficiency in agricultural sector, its benefits have not reached the agricultural labourers especially the women agricultural labourers. They get less and irregular wages and maintain a low standard of life and live below poverty line. Agricultural labourers form an integral part of total Indian labour force (Verma S.K 1992). The exploitation of women labourers in rural regions happens both horizontally and vertically. Therefore, the study of women agricultural labourers is very important in this regard.

KEYWORDS: 'GREEN REVOLUTION', Agricultural Labourers

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INTRODUCTION

Labour productivity in agriculture has two important aspects. First, it profoundly affects national prosperity, i.e. national income; second, it principally determines the standard of living of the agricultural population (BhadraMita 1991; Jacob P 2001). National prosperity in the economic perspective is largely synonymous with the high output per person. Therefore, if a country intends to attain prosperity it needs to encourage technical assistance and improvements to the labour population, which help to increase productivity in the agricultural economy (Vandana S. & Gitanjali B 2002)

Though wage rates have increased over time, the earnings of labourers have declined as the number of days of employment fell more rapidly than rise in wage rates (Mazumder S & Guruswamy M 2006). With the decline in area under rice, the traditionally trained crop-specific labourers switched to nonfarm activities. Seasonal labour shortages and wage rates remaining higher than productivity compelled small and marginal farmers to leave land either fallow or to switch over to less labour-intensive crops. Because of the decline of cultivated area and the subsequent fall in the days of employment, the younger generation preferred non-farm employment while the elderly left the agricultural sector in search of employment avenues in other sectors. This is particularly applicable to women workers (Sandhu&Pushpinder 2002; Rajuladevi 2000; Vaidyanathan A 1994).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Reliable data on the region specific socio-economic status of women agricultural workers is not available through secondary sources. Hence primary data is generated to assess these parameters in the study area. A structured pre-tested questionnaire has been prepared. Total samples of 520 respondents have been contacted. The samples are distributed by adopting purposive, stratified random sampling method. Based on secondary data the blocks are categorised into three groups, namely those blocks where the temporal variation in women agricultural workers is high, moderate and low. Accordingly 50 samples are chosen from high variation blocks, 40

samples from blocks with medium variation and 30 samples from other blocks. These samples are distributed by random method.

SOCIAL STATUS

The social status of women agricultural labourers is assessed by considering the following variables characteristics (Rajharam P. 2001).

- Head of the family
- Caste
- Marital status
- Age
- Type and size of family
- Literacy and Educational level

Economic Condition

Economic condition of the agricultural workers is generally low. The following parameters are used for the assessment of the overall economic status of respondents (Reddy G 2003).

- Working condition and number of labour days
- Average monthly income
- Additional financial support
- Expenditure pattern
- Share of women workers in family expenditure
- Burden of loan
- Availability of Household appliances

Perception and Problems of Women Agricultural Worker

From the primary survey, information is collected to understand the perception of women agricultural workers with regard to the following aspects:

- Opinion about working condition
- Gender disparity in wages, decision making and control of resources
- Health parameters and child welfare activities
- Participation in trade union movement
- Other Major Problems

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

For making an effective planning strategy, it is essential to understand the relationship among the socio-economic and other parameters. This is possible only with the help of a higher level statistical analysis like Factor Analysis.

SPSS 11.5 package is used for factor analysis in the present investigation. The steps involved in the analysis are as follows:

- Thirty-nine numeric variables have been entered for the factor analysis.
- Correlation coefficient and intercorrelation matrix has been prepared.
- Principal components are extracted which discern all the underlying dimensions existent with the data matrix that gives the coefficient of components.
- Eigen values are extracted, which explains the percentage variance between variables.
- Factor loadings are derived for each variables and component matrix are prepared
- Simplification of factor matrix by rotation of factors and generation of Rotated Component Matrix (Varimax rotation) and
- Factor scores are extracted for identified set of factors to explain spatial variance.

The Principal Components

As a first step, the Eigen values are considered since they represent the total variance explained by each factor (Table 1). In the present analysis, 11 components account for almost 97.6 % of the total variance. Table 2 exhibits the factor loadings on each of the 39 variables with regard to these eleven factors. The factor concentrations are calculated simply by determining the proportion of the Eigen value for each factor that is derived from the variables with loadings greater than 0.5. Factor scores for the 13 blocks are collected from the output which are saved as variables and are given in Table.3. For easy comparison and interpretation, the factor scores are then rearranged hierarchically from high positive to high negative values for each factor.

By the principles of interpretation of Eigen values, we could have retained as many as 11 factor dimensions, for Eigen values exceed 1.0 in these cases (Table 1). However, the first four dimensions account for nearly 61 percent of total variance. Since the contribution of other dimensions to the total variance is comparatively less, they are not considered for detailed analysis.

Table 1: The Eigen Values and Cumulative Percentage of Variance

Component	Eigen values	% of Variance	Cumulative %
I	7.890	20.230	20.230
II	7.285	18.679	38.909
III	4.616	11.836	50.745
IV	4.128	10.584	61.329
V	3.453	8.854	70.184
VI	2.661	6.822	77.006
VII	2.241	5.746	82.752
VIII	1.866	4.784	87.537
IX	1.611	4.131	91.668
X	1.235	3.167	94.835
XI	1.076	2.758	97.593

Table 2: Palakkad District – Women Agricultural Workers - Eleven Factor scores

Blocks	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI
Alathur	-0.42	-0.34	1.43	1.31	1.32	1.56	0.75	-0.04	-1.19	-0.48	0.68
Attappady	-1.36	2.58	-0.47	0.14	-0.49	-0.37	-0.69	0.06	-1.10	-0.45	-0.04
Chittur	1.07	0.45	-0.39	1.71	0.10	-0.36	0.92	0.56	0.58	-0.14	-2.22
Kollengode	2.07	0.42	-1.54	-0.15	-0.40	0.44	0.66	-0.42	-0.31	-0.13	1.55
Kuzhalmannam	-1.05	-1.07	-1.43	0.62	0.94	-0.51	-0.61	-1.12	-0.11	1.71	-0.23
Malampuzha	0.65	0.19	1.29	-0.87	0.69	-1.58	0.10	1.65	-0.30	1.32	0.35
Mannarkkad	0.53	0.01	1.07	-0.71	-1.60	1.09	-0.19	-1.10	-0.71	1.54	-0.86
Nenmara	-0.60	1.06	0.26	-0.91	1.00	0.51	0.94	-0.72	2.32	0.28	0.43
Ottappalam	0.25	-0.59	-0.17	0.01	0.49	-1.34	-0.13	-0.49	-0.81	-0.70	0.68
Palakkad	0.87	-0.17	0.44	0.14	0.41	0.55	-2.80	0.12	0.98	-0.85	-0.09
Pattambi	-0.76	-0.82	0.85	0.98	-1.98	-1.09	0.40	-0.36	1.01	-0.66	0.87
Srikrishnapuram	-0.93	-0.84	-1.15	-0.34	-0.73	1.26	0.06	2.29	0.20	0.22	0.22
Thrithala	-0.31	-0.89	-0.19	-1.93	0.25	-0.16	0.60	-0.43	-0.54	-1.66	-1.35

Factor I- Social Status of the Family

The first dimension has seven variables which are statistically significant. This dimension has an Eigen value of 7.89 and a total variance of 20.23 percent (Table 3). The variables are loaded both ways (Table 1). Positively loaded variables are Female head of the family (0.928), Widows (0.920), Gender disparity in decision making (0.750), Agricultural workers with age above 50 (0.703), and Labour union membership (0.504). The variables loaded in the negative direction are Married (-0.910) and Nuclear family (-0.853).

Table 3: Factor I -Social Status of the Family

Variable Code	Variables	Positive Factor Loadings	Negative Factor Loadings
1	Married		-0.910
2	Female headed family	0.928	
3	Widows	0.920	
4	Nuclear family		-0.853
5	Gender disparity in decision making	0.750	
6	Agricultural workers with age above 50	0.703	
7	Labour Union membership	0.504	
Eigen Value		7.890	
Total Variance explained		20.230	
Cumulative Variance explained		20.230	

The variables indicate the social status of the women agricultural workers of the area of investigation. Widows participating agricultural labour is a common phenomenon in this region. This is because due to the absence of male income females are compelled to earn a living. In this social dimension factor, another variable loaded moderately heavily is female head of family (Swaminathan P 2002; Sundari & Gowri 2002). These two variables are complimentary to each other, since after the death of the husband, females are forced to become the head of the family. Age above 50 or the older age group among the respondents was widows and is the head of the family. Labour union membership is another variable, which is loaded positively in this dimension. Senior workers are normally the members of labour unions, they are aware of the benefits of labour unions. Two negatively loaded variables married and nuclear family is lacking in certain parts of the study area, and they are related to each other. This Dimension may be named as the **Social Status of the Family** (Srivastava N 2003; Sharma & Ogale 2003).

Chittur and Kollengode exhibit a very high score in this regard. This indicates that the Social Status of the family is very high in these two blocks. At the other extreme lie the Attappady and Kuzhalmannam blocks. Rest of the blocks are in the moderate level.

Factor II- Community, Literacy and Poverty

The second factor is loaded with seven variables loaded from 0.605 to 0.937 in both directions. This has an Eigen value of 7.3 and a total variance of 18.7 percent. The positively loaded variables are Small Family (0.937), Illiterates (0.898), Very high expenditure on food (0.868) SC/ST community (0.703) and More years in agriculture (0.637). The variable, which is loaded negatively in this component are Other backward community (0-.627

Literacy is generally low in the case of SC/ST category. This is true in the case of women agricultural workers also. Poverty as an aspect determines the food habits and hence the expenditure on food (Oommen M.A. 2008); Sharma A.N 2005). Further poverty also makes it necessary for women workers to be in the job for more years. Illiteracy is high among the SC/ST agricultural workers hence the negative relationship with the newspaper. The high positive score is seen in Attappady and Nenmara, which indicates a comparatively low development. Kuzhalmannam represents high negative value while Thrithala, Srikrishnapuram and Pattambi exhibit low negative status in this dimension

Table 4: Factor II – Community, Literacy and Poverty

Variable Code	Variables	Positive Factor Loadings	Negative Factor Loadings
8	Small Family	0.937	
9	Illiterates	0.898	
10	Very high expenditure on food	0.868	
11	SC/ST	0.703	
12	Other Backward community		-0.621
13	More years in agriculture	0.637	
14	Availability of Newspaper		-0.605
Eigen Value		7.285	
Total Variance explained		18.679	

Factor III- Education and Awareness

This component has an Eigen value of 4.6 and a total variance of 11.8 percent. Five variables are loaded in this factor, three of them positively and two variables negatively. Positively loaded variables are Poor working condition of work (0.771), Lower primary level of education (0.702) and High school level of education (0.502). The negatively loaded variables are upper primary level of education (-0.946) and Gender disparity in wages.

Table 5: Factor III – Education and Awareness

Variable Code	Variables	Positive Factor Loadings	Negative Factor Loadings
15	Upper Primary level of Education		-0.946
16	Poor working condition	0.771	
17	Lower Primary level of Education	0.702	
20	Gender disparity in wages		-0.568
24	High school level of education	0.502	
Eigen Value		4.616	
Total Variance explained		11.836	

This dimension has brought out the fact that irrespective of Level of education, working condition is poor for women agricultural workers. Even where there is a concentration of workers with high school level education, the condition remains the same. The lack of interest for the educated women for agricultural work may be the reason for the same (ZarQuresh 2005; Nandal 2005).

Spatial pattern of this factor dimension is noticed that very high value occurs in Alathur, Malampuzha and Mannarkkad. Factor scores of this dimension are very low in Kollengode, Kuzhalmannam and Srikrishnapuram.

Factor IV – Problem of Low Wages

The Fourth dimension indicates the problem of Low wages. The Eigen value is 4.1 and the total variance explained is 10.6 %. All the variables in this dimension are positively loaded (Table 6). The major variables are Higher share of women in family expenditure (0.865), Low wages (0.790), Gender disparity in wages (0.679), Loan availed (0.560) and Availability of newspaper (0.505). From the positively loaded variables it is observed that the existence of the family depends on females, even though they are getting lower wage than their male counterpart. Because of the gender disparity in wages they found difficulty in managing the domestic matters smoothly and they are forced to avail loans. It may be noted that the problem of low wages is very high in Alathur and Chittur which are the important rice growing regions and Thrithala scores very low in this dimension (Mahapatra S 2002; Pushpangathan&Murugan 2000).

Table 6: Factor IV – Problem of Low Wages

Variable Code	Variables	Positive Factor Loadings	Negative Factor Loadings
18	Higher share of women in family expenditure	0.865	
19	Low wages – a problem	0.790	
20	Gender disparity in wages	0.679	
21	Loan availed	0.560	
14	Availability of Newspaper	0.505	
Eigen Value		4.128	
Total Variance explained		10.584	

CONCLUSIONS

Having discussed the four major dimensions that explain the variance of characteristics of Women agricultural labour in the study area, it is apt to group the Blocks in the District into different categories for effective planning strategy.

It may be noted that the 13 blocks in Palakkad District may be grouped into three categories. Malampuzha, Chittur, Mannarkad and Alathur belong to the first group. These blocks register positive factor loadings for all the four factors. This indicates that these are the areas where the problem of women agricultural workers is more acute and planning strategy for these areas should be different from that for the other blocks. It may be seen that in all the blocks except Mannarkad rice cultivation is dominant (Melnic&Vijaya 2004; Unni J. 2000)

Kollengode, Attappady, Nenmara and Palakkad belong to the moderate problem area category. These blocks have both positive and negative factor loadings.

Pattambi, Ottappalam, Srikrishnapuram, Thirthala and Kuzhalmannam blocks have comparatively lesser problems with regard to women agricultural workers. It may be noted that almost all these blocks lie in the western part of the District, where rice cultivation is comparatively low.

Suitable planning strategies have to be devised separately for these groups of blocks with regard to the condition of women agricultural labourers so that the overall development of the region can be achieved (Malik S 2005; Chaudhary et al 2002).

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